

To: The Planning and Development Committee

From: Kate Sheehan, Head of IT at Stratford Library and a Trumbull Resident

I am writing in support of HB 6800 AN ACT CONCERNING ELECTRONIC BOOK AND DIGITAL AUDIOBOOK LICENSING.

Libraries have always purchased materials in a variety of formats. We have purchased books in hardcover, paperback, on tape, then CD, as Playaways and in large print. Ebooks and eaudiobooks are, at first blush, more of the same. However, they are more than just a new format. When we buy physical materials, we do so at a discount off retail pricing from a variety of library vendors. With ebooks, we must purchase a platform for circulation and then buy the ebooks from the vendor that makes the platform. They are less book than software, coming with licensing agreements that preclude true ownership. We can lend them only to those who hold a card in our library, circumventing the statewide reciprocity that allows Connecticut residents to use libraries throughout the state.

Most distressingly, the prices are significantly higher than retail and the books expire. Management of a physical collection is both science and art. Print books can be repaired, and replacements can be managed based on budget and popularity of a title or subject. Ebooks and eaudiobooks vanish on a pre-determined schedule and must be re-purchased at the same high price to be kept in the collection. There is no way to build a rich collection for our patrons - the cost is higher for a lower-value format.

As with any technology, ebook and eaudiobook pricing has changed over the years, however unlike any other format, the terms have gotten much worse for libraries. Prices have gone up and publishers have increasingly adopted the expiring ebook since HarperCollins pioneered the practice in 2011. We can buy fewer and fewer ebooks for increasingly long wait lists. Ebook use grew steadily in the 2010s, and then exploded with the pandemic. Ebooks offer accessibility features like custom fonts or larger print size that are impossible or expensive to replicate in print. Readers who can't hold a hefty large print volume can wield a lightweight tablet or ereader and get a wider variety of titles. Ebooks are going to continue to be popular and libraries need a sustainable and equitable way to buy them.

I've worked at a number of different public libraries in Connecticut and to a one, my colleagues take their role as stewards of public funds to heart. We support authors (who are not paid more for these more expensive purchases and would likely make more money if we could buy more copies), and we want our communities to have equitable access to materials in as many formats as possible. We want ebooks for the retirees who devour a book or two a week and are delighted to use their library's ebook collection, for families embarking on road trips who use eaudiobooks to quell backseat complaints and bond over favorite stories, and for reluctant readers who used the dyslexic font or read-aloud features on tablets to spark a love of the written word. We need your help to meet the needs of our patrons. The current terms are unfair to libraries, authors, readers, and all Connecticut taxpayers. Please support HB 6800.